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General and complete disarmament: assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them

Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

This report covers events and activities at the international, regional and subregional levels relating to the provision of assistance to States in their efforts to curb the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them.

Section II of the report outlines actions taken by the United Nations, inter alia, by the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects and the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters and through the United Nations Trust Fund for the Consolidation of Peace through Practical Disarmament Measures.

Section III gives a brief account of the requests made by States for United Nations assistance in their efforts to curb the illicit circulation of small arms and collecting such arms and actions taken by the United Nations in response.

Section IV covers the regional and subregional initiatives relating to the subject, including those taken by the Organization of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community and in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. A number of paragraphs are devoted to the establishment of national commissions against the proliferation of small arms.

* A/55/150.
** This report covers events and activities relating to the subject from October 1999 to July 2000.

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I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 54/54 J of 1 December 1999, entitled "Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them", the General Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts, in the context of the implementation of resolution 49/75 G of 15 December 1994 and of the recommendations of the United Nations advisory missions, to curb the illicit circulation and proliferation of small arms and to collect such arms in the affected States that so request, with the support of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa and in close cooperation with the Organization of African Unity. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to continue to examine the question and to submit a report to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report is submitted pursuant to the above-mentioned request. It takes into account a number of initiatives taken at the national, subregional, regional and international levels to address the issue of the illicit circulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, focusing on the aspect of providing assistance to States.

II. Activities within the United Nations

A. Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

3. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/54 V, entitled "Small arms", the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects was held in New York from 28 February to 3 March 2000. During the session, a large number of delegations stressed the need for and the importance of strengthening international, regional and subregional cooperation in international efforts to combat, control and eliminate the illicit circulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. They also called on the international community to provide more assistance to the countries and regions most affected by the illicit circulation and excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons, including their efforts to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate ex-combatants, collecting and destroying arms in post-conflict situations.

B. Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

4. At its session held from 31 January to 2 February 2000, the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters considered again the question of small arms in general. The discussion pointed to a triple-track approach to the United Nations Conference on small arms. The first track could be global consciousness-raising; the second track would involve the creation of international norms; the third track, and by far the most important, would involve the efforts, initiatives and activities of regions and subregions to address the issue. It was pointed out that sustained efforts were necessary, since the effects of small arms proliferation could last a long time after a conflict ended. The international community was called upon to play a pivotal role in supporting countries and regions in those efforts, both politically and financially.

C. United Nations Trust Fund for the Consolidation of Peace through Practical Disarmament Measures

5. The United Nations Trust Fund for the Consolidation of Peace through Practical Disarmament Measures was established by the Secretary-General in August 1998, on the recommendation of the Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures.[1] The Trust Fund is administered by the Department for Disarmament Affairs, United Nations Secretariat. Among the objectives of the Fund are to assist countries affected by the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons in their efforts to consolidate peace through practical disarmament measures, including retrieval, storage and safeguarding of weapons from demobilized personnel and for the destruction of those weapons; to promote the exchange of national and subregional experiences in the collection, control and disposal of arms, especially small arms and light weapons, and the reintegration of former combatants into civil society after the end of armed conflicts; and to enhance harmonization of national legislation and information exchange among

States to monitor transboundary trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

6. Since the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the Department for Disarmament Affairs has been working closely with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and with members of the Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures, seeking to use the Trust Fund to provide support for projects and programmes on practical disarmament and related development issues, including support for programmes of weapons collection and destruction. Members of the Group of Interested States have made further financial contributions to the Trust Fund, earmarked for a number of projects in countries such as Albania, Congo and Niger.

III. Requests from Member States for United Nations Assistance

7. A number of prevention and reduction measures aimed at curbing the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms were set forth in the 1997 report of the Secretary-General on small arms (A/52/298). In resolution 54/54 J, the General Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to assist States in curbing the illicit circulation of small arms and to collect such arms in the affected States that so request. The information set out below is relevant to those efforts.

A. Albania

8. The Gramsh pilot project known as "Weapons in exchange for development" has concluded successfully. The Government of Albania, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, UNDP and the Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures worked closely to ensure the success of the project. As a result of it, about 6,000 weapons and over 100 tons of munitions were collected in one district. More importantly, the project has begun to change the local population's attitude towards weapons and has contributed to a marked improvement in the safety and security situation and in the relationship between the population and the police. As part of the project, development incentives and activities, such as repairing local roads, building bridges, setting up radio telephone systems and rehabilitating electricity facilities have also benefited the community.

9. The Government of Albania has requested the Department for Disarmament Affairs and UNDP to expand the project into other areas of the country. Members of the Group of Interested States and other donors have agreed to provide financial support to the expansion of the pilot project to the districts of Elbasan and Dibra. In April 2000, the Department dispatched an evaluation mission to Albania to assess the result of the pilot project — in particular, the disarmament aspect, to date — and the circumstances in which the project was to be expanded to the districts of Elbasan and Dibra and the expected outcomes.

B. Congo

10. On 18 March 2000, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Congo addressed a letter to the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, requesting the assistance of the United Nations in consolidating the cessation of hostilities in the country. In particular, the letter requested the Department for Disarmament Affairs to dispatch a fact-finding mission to the Congo to evaluate the prospect for a possible project on reintegration of former combatants and the collection of small arms.

11. The Department, in close consultation with the Department of Political Affairs, agreed to send a joint information-gathering mission to the Congo from 26 to 28 July 2000. The objective was to assess the current situation in the country regarding the evolution of the political process and its needs in the area of collection and disposal of small arms and light weapons and the reintegration of former combatants.

C. Guinea-Bissau

12. After the successful completion of the electoral process and following consultations with the new Government of Guinea-Bissau, the Secretary-General proposed and the Security Council approved the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) for one year after its previous mandate expired on 31 March 2000. The new mandate, among other things, is to seek the commitment of the Government and other parties to adopt a programme of voluntary arms

collection, disposal and destruction. To that end, UNOGBIS, working closely with the Government of Guinea-Bissau, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED) and the Department for Disarmament Affairs, developed a project entitled "Collection of illegal arms from the civilian population". The project is currently under active consideration by relevant United Nations agencies and departments.

D. Niger

13. In August 1999, the Government of Niger submitted an initial project proposal for the collection of small arms in the country. The Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures met and considered the proposed project and agreed to support it in principle. The Group accordingly requested the Department for Disarmament Affairs to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Niger. The objective of the mission, scheduled for 30 July to 12 August, was to make a preliminary evaluation of the situation in the country and assist the Government in developing a possible programme of retrieving and collecting weapons. The terms of reference for the mission included evaluation of the adequacy of a proposed pilot project and exploration of undertaking a weapons collection and disposal programme suited to the needs of the country. The mission also examined the needs and the functioning of the National Commission for the Collection and Control of Illicit Arms.

E. Sierra Leone

14. After the joint mission of PCASED and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 9 March to 2 April 2000, a technical commission was put in place, charged with responsibility for the destruction of small arms and light weapons already collected in the framework of the process of disarmament and demilitarization, as foreseen in the Lomé Peace Agreement. The Government of Sierra Leone had affirmed its determination to destroy the collected weapons, targeting the end of April 2000 for the beginning of the progressive destruction. Unfortunately, the recent outbreak of hostility in the country put on hold this disarmament initiative.

IV. Regional and subregional initiatives

A. Organization of African Unity

15. Pursuant to the decision adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting at its thirty-fifth ordinary session in Algiers, Algeria, on the issue of illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking in small arms and light weapons, the general secretariat of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) convened the first Continental Meeting of African Experts on Small Arms and Light Weapons in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 17 to 19 May 2000. The meeting was part of the preparations for the OAU Ministerial Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons, to be held in Bamako, Mali, from 30 October to 3 November 2000. The meeting reiterated the urgency and the need for inter-African cooperation in addressing the problems associated with the illicit use, transfer and manufacture of small arms and light weapons and called for further cooperation at the international, regional and national levels. The OAU general secretariat, with the support and collaboration of the Institute for Security Studies (based in South Africa) and the cooperation of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, also convened an International Consultation on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 22 to 23 June 2000. The Consultation came up with a number of recommendations, including urging OAU to develop a coordination mechanism to assist Member States, international organizations, regional organizations and civil society to work together for the common goal of controlling and reducing the illicit proliferation and circulation of and trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

B. Southern African Development Community

16. Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are in the process of negotiating a protocol on the control of firearms,

ammunition and other related materials in the SADC region. This action is a manifestation of the SADC member States' determination to enhance cooperation and mutual assistance at the regional level, with the objective of effectively combating and eliminating the problem of small arms and light weapons.

C. Nairobi Declaration

17. In March 2000, the Foreign Ministers of all 10 countries of the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa (Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania) met in Nairobi and issued the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa. The 10 countries expressed their resolution to coordinate efforts in tackling the challenges posed by the excessive accumulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the subregion and outlined specific measures to that end. The Nairobi Declaration calls for effective implementation of the relevant decisions of the United Nations and OAU and other regional arrangements that address the problem of illicit small arms and light weapons in the subregion and appeals for increased international support for programmes and initiatives that advance human security and promote conditions conducive to long-term peace, stability and development in the subregion.

D. National commissions against the proliferation of small arms

18. By its resolutions 53/77 B and 54/54 J, the General Assembly "encourages the setting up in the countries of the Saharo-Sahelian subregion of national commissions against the proliferation of small arms, and invites the international community to support as far as possible the smooth functioning of the national commissions where they have been set up".

19. To date, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali and Niger have established national commissions. Other countries in the subregion are in the process of taking the necessary steps to set up national commissions.

20. In order to promote the establishment of national commissions against the proliferation of small arms, PCASED prepared the terms of reference for those bodies and forwarded them to all the Governments of ECOWAS. The ECOWAS Council of Ministers, held in Lomé in December 1999, adopted a decision urging Governments of the subregion to accelerate their efforts in establishing national commissions.

21. Since January 2000, PCASED and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, have dispatched missions to Gambia, Ghana, Liberia and Mali to help facilitate and consolidate the establishment of national commissions. PCASED staff also visited Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Sierra Leone to facilitate the establishment of national commissions. As part of the missions' agenda, PCASED and the Department devoted time to developing a strategy for local and international resource mobilization. This is to help build up the capacity of national commissions to fund their activities and enable them to be self-reliant. A database of local and international donors interested in disarmament issues was also compiled to facilitate the resource mobilization aspect of national commissions.

22. PCASED, in cooperation with the Department, has prepared draft guidelines for the establishment of national commissions. The draft was reviewed during the PCASED evaluation meeting in Bamako in early May 2000, and it is being finalized for publication and circulation among countries in the region.

Notes

[1] The open-ended Group of Interested States on Practical Disarmament Measures was established in March 1998, in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 51/38 G of 9 December 1997, entitled "Consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures".